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Don't Let Them Rewrite History!

This seems to be the season for misrepresentations of the history of the Vietnam conflict. So eager are the peace-at-any-price advocates to consummate the final betrayal of South Vietnam that no distortion, no lie, seems too gross for them. (We attempted to answer some of the these distortions in last Thursday's editorial, "Why Ky Is Adamant on VC," Union Leader, Dec. 26, 1968).

Included among the "facts we know that are not so" is the bold assertion, by certain left-leaning news commentators and newspaper columnists, that South Vietnam allegedly violated the Geneva accords when the Diem government refused to hold re-unification elections in 1956. The revival of this leftist line coincides, interestingly enough, with Hanoi's insistence at the Paris peace talks that the negotiations can progress only if Washington gets rid of the current "illegal" government in Saigon.

As to the complete lack of truth in the claim that Saigon violated the Geneva accords, it should be pointed out that even major critics of the war effort concede the falsity of the charge. Thus, Vietnam war critic Hans Morgenthau pointed out, in 1956, that "free elections are very subtle instruments which require a dedication to certain moral values and the existence of certain moral conditions which are by no means prevalent in either North or South Vietnam." The New York Times, let it never be forgotten, also argued against such elections in 1956 and 1957, and President Kennedy, then (1956) a senator from Massachusetts, pointed out:

"Neither the United States nor free Vietnam was a party to that (Geneva) agreement — and neither the United States nor free Vietnam is ever going to be a party to an election obviously stacked and subverted in advance, urged upon us by those who have already broken their own pledges under the agreement they now seek to enforce."

On the other hand, President Eisenhower is widely quoted as having said that if free elections had been held in 1956, 80 per cent of the people would have voted for Ho Chi Minh as opposed to Ngo Dinh Diem. This, too, is an outright lie. What the sale was that 80 per cent would have voted Ho rather than for the highly unpopular Emperor Bao Dai.

Another false claim is that Diem's refusal to hold the reunification elections preceded any violations of the Geneva agreement by Hanoi. The truth of the matter is that North Vietnam had refused to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, in accordance with the Geneva agreement, and that under such conditions, truly free elections — free from terrorizing of the villagers — were an impossibility.

These critics of Saigon also neglect to mention that neither South Vietnam nor the United States signed the Geneva accords; that in fact, South Vietnam had attempted — unsuccessfully — to place the entire area under United Nations control until the reestablishment of peace and secur-

ity would permit really free general elections.

Diem stated the case clearly and concisely on July 16, 1955: "We did not sign the Geneva Agreement. We are not bound in any way by these agreements . . . We do not reject the principle of elections as a peaceful and democratic means to achieve unity. But elections can be one of the foundations of true democracy only on the condition that they are absolutely free. And we shall be skeptical about the achieving of the conditions of free elections in the North under the regime of oppression carried on by the Viet Minh."

Let's look at the practical politics of the situation in 1956: The North, under an iron dictatorship, outnumbered the population of the South by 2,000,000 people — even after the exodus to the South of 1,000,000 refugees. The Communists had an efficient underground apparatus in the South, and the International Control Commission simply lacked the manpower to assure that elections would be conducted fairly in the South, let alone in the North.

Critics of Saigon would also have you forget that, immediately following the Geneva agreement, Ho Chi Minh vowed publicly to bring about the reunification of his state with South Vietnam. Viet Minh cadres in the South organized an "army of liberation" calling itself the "Patriotic Front," and launched campaigns of military action, kidnaping and outright terrorism. This "army of liberation" was publicly supported by Ho Chi Minh in contravention of the Geneva accords. Ho again violated the agreements by preventing tens of thousands of northerners from moving to the South after they had petitioned to do so.

Actually, Hanoi had expected the South to fall before the creation of the "army of liberation." The new government in Saigon was being attacked by private armies and dissident sects such as the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, and by the Binh Xuyen river pirates who had enjoyed monopolies of gambling and prostitution under the French. When the South didn't fall, Hanoi in 1958 stepped up its campaign and Hanoi Radio broadcast specific instructions to the Viet Minh and the political cadres in the South which were monitored by the ICC. The latter, of course, was impotent to act, because Hanoi wouldn't permit free inspections and the ICC's Indian chairman refused to act unless he had the unanimous approval of his Polish and Canadian colleagues. Poland, of course, never voted for any action that was not to the Communists' advantage.

If the news media of the United States had done its job of informing the American people concerning these events, instead of pandering almost exclusively to the get-out-of-Vietnam faction, the leftists' attempts to rewrite the recent history of Vietnam would fall on deaf ears and the Ky government would have the vocal support of the American people for refusing to sell out at the current Paris peace talks.